

Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program

FY 2013 Annual Report



Prepared by

The Wildlife Division

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Program Goal

To efficiently and responsibly conserve and enhance upland game bird habitats and populations—providing quality public hunting opportunities for present and future generations.

INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) administers the statewide Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP), which is organized into two key programs:

1. Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (Montana ARM 12.9.7)
2. Upland Game Bird Release Program (Montana ARM 12.9.6)

The principle outcomes of the UGBEP are establishment or enhancement of upland game bird habitats; conservation of valuable game bird habitats; pheasant releases and wild turkey transplants; and enhanced public upland game bird hunting opportunities.

This annual progress report serves as a summary of program outcomes and progress for fiscal year 2013 (FY13). Fiscal summaries are provided and program accomplishments are highlighted. This report is intended for the UGBEP Council, legislators, FWP staff, and interested organizations and citizens.

FY 2013 NOTABLE PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS –SUMMARY BRIEF

Several unique program milestones have been accomplished during FY13. These are highlighted in the section below. A more comprehensive review of habitat accomplishments is summarized on Page 16 of this report.

OPEN FIELDS FOR GAME BIRD HUNTERS

One of the more prominent outcomes of FY13 was the debut of Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters (Open Fields). The program was funded through the USDA Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), a competitive federal grant program authorized under the Food Security Act (Table 1 on page 11). Open Fields targeted private lands enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in 3 focus areas located within Regions 4, 6, and 7 (Figure 1). The objectives of this program were to provide incentives to private landowners to (1) enroll new lands into CRP during the 2012 USDA-Farm Service Agency CRP general sign-up, (2) maintain current enrollments in CRP, (3) use an incentive payment to restrict haying or grazing of CRP beyond what is required for maintenance, and (4) provide hunters with free public walk-in access on private lands for fall game bird hunting.

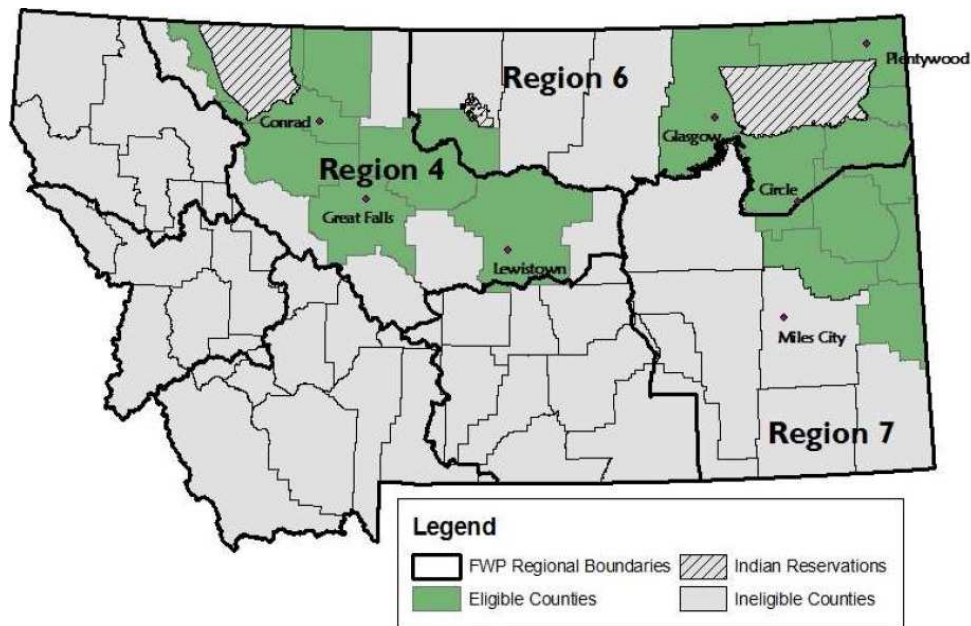


Figure 1. Map showing counties eligible for Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters.

Landowners enrolled in Open Fields received a onetime payment of \$5/acre for each year the land is enrolled in the program. Enrollments were limited to up to 160 acres per landowner, however landowners could enroll additional acres for walk-in access. Once enrolled, landowners were required to follow the USDA Farm Service Agency standard maintenance plans. Enrolled lands were clearly posted to identify the area open to walk in game bird hunting (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters program sign.

Because Open Fields is a walk-in program with no further permission needed, the UGBEP developed county-wide maps to distribute to game bird hunters. These maps clearly showed access boundaries and road names to help hunters find enrolled properties. Open Fields is denoted by the brown polygons (Figure 3).

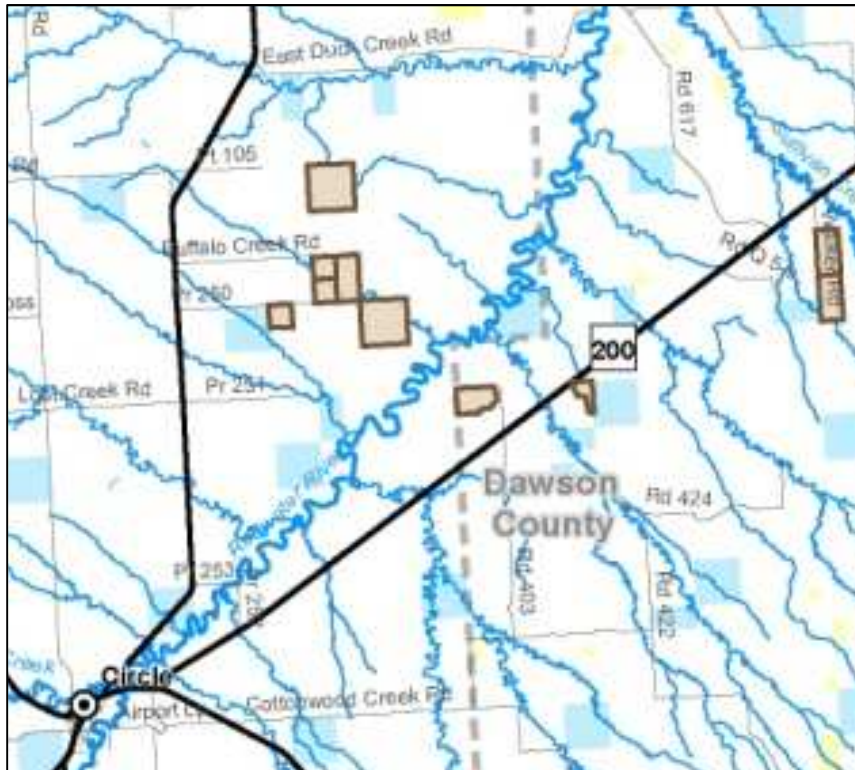


Figure 3. Example of an Open Fields map in McCone and Dawson counties.

Open Fields was also integrated into FWP's Interactive Hunt Planner, a comprehensive online tool that provides hunters with various geographical map layers representing access opportunities and associated requirements. (<http://fwp.mt.gov/gis/maps/huntPlanner/>). Using the same map image as above (Figure 3), Figure 4 shows an example of the interactive hunt planner that depicts Open Fields sites (brown polygons) and also includes UGBEP project sites (green symbols) and Block Management Areas (gray polygons). Through the FWP Hunt Planner, hunters can click on polygons and retrieve access details, maps, and additional information.

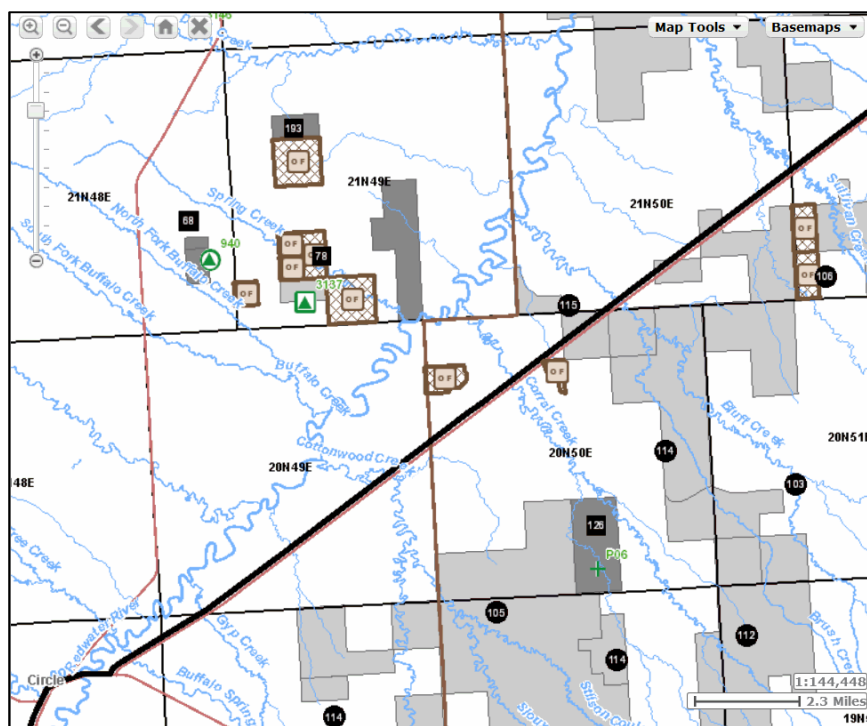


Figure 4. FWP's interactive Hunt Planner showing Open Fields, UGBEP projects, and Block Management Areas.

UGBEP ARM RULES

In response to the newly adopted strategic plan, the department revised and adopted Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) to help implement the plan and to provide greater clarity for program administration, consistent with UGBEP Council recommendations. Significant rule changes adopted on September 7, 2012 include:

Upland Game Bird Release Program (12.9.6)

- 15% funding cap for pheasant releases, wild turkey transplants, and emergency supplemental feeding. The 15% cap is further divided into three portions: 87% (pheasant release), 10% (wild turkey transplants), and 10% (emergency supplemental feeding).
- New pheasant release application deadline: January 15
- Applicants may apply annually for up to 5 years for pheasant releases. An additional 5 years of releases may be authorized if significant habitat enhancement activities take place.
- Stronger emphasis on pheasant health and recognition of the department's right to refuse to pay for and release pheasants that appear unhealthy.
- A new application selection process for when the number of applications exceeds available funding.

- Emergency/supplemental feeding confined to Sheridan, Daniels, and Roosevelt counties.
- Additional refinement of supplemental feeding rules.

Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (12.9.7)

- Maintenance costs are defined as separate from project expenses, particularly in relationship to the project spending cap referenced in statute (MCA 87-1-248).
- Program definitions are included in rule as described in the strategic plan.
- Revised rule on contract violations by project cooperators that changed wording from “will” be disqualified to “may” be disqualified in order that FWP may take into account unexpected events beyond the cooperator’s control such as natural disasters or other situations.
- Habitat projects may be considered on private land less than 100 acres if the project is adjacent to a larger areas of public land that supports public access.
- FWP may use other department funds and resources to provide cost-share for UGBEP projects.
- Removed language that emphasizes program funding on private lands as a higher priority than public areas. Under this revision, public and private lands will have equal priority where applicable.
- The department’s 75% cost-share cap is removed to allow for percentages to be negotiated by field staff based on project value, length, and priority.
- The NRCS standard cost list – and other relevant standard cost lists – may now be used to establish program payment levels for project costs such as fences, shelterbelts, etc. This is an alternative to paying for project costs based on actual expense receipts.

HABITAT FOREVER CONTRACTS

Since 2008, FWP has partnered with Habitat Forever, BLM, and local Pheasant Forever chapters through Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) to support 2 farming specialist positions in Billings and Denton. These farming specialists conduct intensive farming activities at various project areas to enhance upland game bird hunting on lands open to public hunting. Information on this partnership can be found on page 22 of this report.

On December 31, 2012, the two MOUs with Habitat Forever expired. In order to ensure existing habitat projects were maintained, the department solicited a request for proposals from prospective contractors in order to continue work in the Billings and Denton vicinities. In April 2013, Habitat Forever was awarded 2 contracts by the department to continue these habitat enhancement activities. Both contracts will expire December 31, 2017.

REVISED PROGRAM WEB PAGE

The department's web page is a large clearinghouse of information available to hunters, recreationists, educators, and other people interested in FWP. To make the UGBEP web page more visible, links to program information pertinent to landowners or hunters are listed on FWP's home page. Additionally, the link to the default program web page has been shortened to: fwp.mt.gov/ugbep.

The default program page was also redesigned to a more user-friendly visual presentation, rather than a text-heavy layout (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Layout of the UGBEP home page.

CARAGANA PROMOTION

During March 2013, an outreach effort was initiated to promote habitat enhancement partnerships through the UGBEP. The focus areas were in Regions 4, 6, and 7. Promotional letters were sent to 156 cooperators who recently participated in the UGBEP pheasant release program but had not participated in the habitat enhancement cost-share program.

To participate in the promotion, landowners were encouraged to contact their local biologist to learn more about the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program. In return, the landowner would receive 50 caragana seedlings to plant in an existing shelterbelt with no further commitment (i.e., no UGBEP contract).

Out of the 156 letters sent, approximately 52 (33%) were returned undeliverable for a variety of reasons. Namely, many of the landowners hold temporary addresses and live elsewhere during the wintery months.

Through this pilot effort, 7 landowners responded to the promotion and contacted their local biologist. The UGBEP expended a total of \$260 to purchase 350 caragana seedlings for the interested landowners.

FABRIC MULCH

To help facilitate program purchases and meet State procurement requirements, the UGBEP established a 2-year contract to purchase fabric mulch for UGBEP shelterbelt projects through a supplier. Field staff can place mulch fabric orders and provide a date needed for shipment. The cost for 1 roll of 6' x 300' fabric is \$108, which includes freight.

UGBEP BROCHURE



The program brochure was revised in FY13 to provide field staff with an outreach product that contains updated program information (Figure 6). The brochure serves to welcome interested landowners to the program while providing detailed highlights on eligibility and program requirements.

Figure 6. The new UGBEP brochure features program details and eligibility requirements.

LIFE AFTER CRP PUBLICATION

An article in the November-December 2010 *Montana Outdoors* publication reported “Congressional cutbacks and high commodity prices are compelling landowners to convert Conservation Reserve Program grasslands—which benefit pheasants, ducks, and other prairie wildlife—back to crops.” In response to this issue, a booklet modeled after a North Dakota publication was produced through a collaborative effort of the following Montana agencies and organizations: Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Ducks Unlimited, and Pheasants Forever.

This Montana publication is intended to provide landowners and operators with guidance on ways to manage expired CRP acres for profitability, while maintaining at least some benefits for pheasants and other wildlife (Figure 7). Included with this publication is an insert that contains up-to-date information on various conservation and habitat programs available to landowners and lessees. Both the publication and insert are available online at fwp.mt.gov/ugbep.

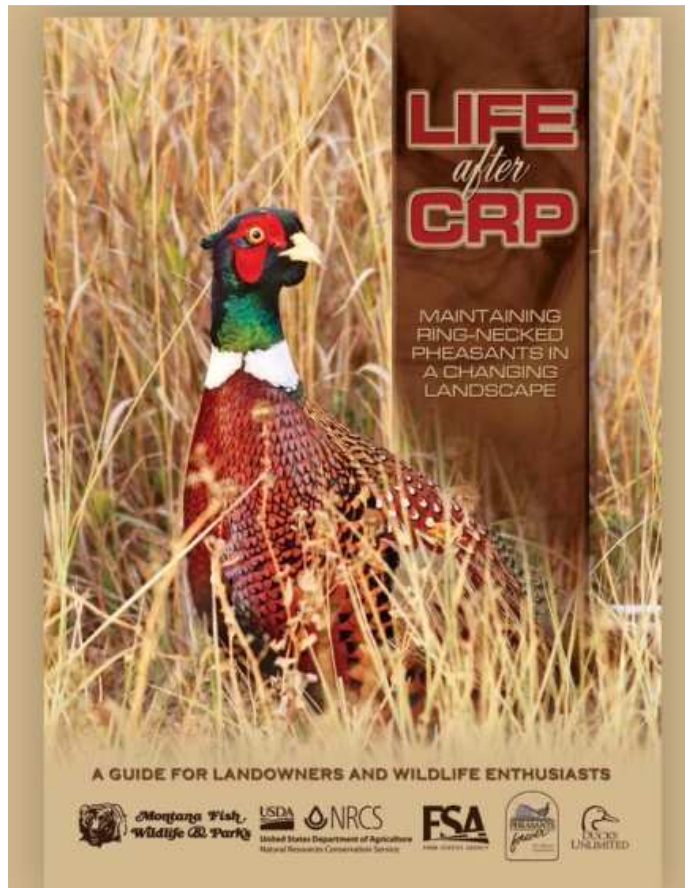


Figure 7. Front cover of *Life after CRP* publication.

FY 2013 REVENUE, EXPENDITURES, AND OBLIGATED FUNDS

Table 1 provides a breakdown of revenue and expenditures of the UGBEP. The beginning balance of UGBEP funds in FY13 was \$3,188,244 and the balance at the close of FY13 was \$3,187,811. Total unobligated funds at the end of FY13 were \$3,044,233.

Administrative expenditures for FY13 included all costs attributable to the overall operation and implementation of the program, including personal services and operations costs of the UGBEP coordinator and the 3 upland game bird habitat biologists. Examples of administrative costs included: salaries, benefits, travel expenses, computers, professional development, and program advertizing/publications. The 12-member council met 2 times during FY13, and expenditures included daily honorariums, mileage and lodging costs, per-diem allowances, and

meeting expenses. Administrative expenditures also included \$14,000 to support a sage-grouse grazing evaluation study, which also served as match for a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG).

Funding obligations total \$143,578 that will be paid on projects that are (1) either nearing completion or (2) involve annual payments. Nearly \$38,000 of the obligated funds are for two 10-year contracts involving annual payments for CRP conservation.

Table 1. Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program revenue and spending during FY13 (87-1-246 and 87-1-247, MCA).

UGBEP FUNDING		FY13 EXPENDITURES				BALANCE SUMMARY		
FY13 Beginning Balance (\$)	License Revenue	Bird Planting (\$)	Habitat Enhancement (\$)	Admin (\$)	Total Expenditures (\$)	FY13 Year End Balance	Program Obligations through FY13 (\$)	FY14 Available Balance (\$)
3,188,244	611,401	79,568	334,373	163,412 ¹	611,832	\$3,187,811	143,578	3,044,233

¹Administrative expenditures include \$11,259 for the UGBEP Citizens' Advisory Council and \$14,000 match for the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG).

The program also benefited from outside funds, including Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid that funded 3 UGBEP habitat biologist positions and associated operations, and a grant from the USDA Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) for funding Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters (Table 2).

Table 2. Non-license funds that contributed to the UGBEP in FY13.

Source	PROGRAM EXPENDITURES		
	Habitat Enhancement (\$)	Admin (\$)	Total Expenditures (\$)
Pittman-Robertson	NA	164,493	164,493
VPA-HIP	306,271		306,271
TOTALS	306,271	164,493	470,764

UPLAND GAME BIRD RELEASE PROGRAM

BIRD PLANTING FUND

Fifteen percent of the FY13 revenue (\$101,115) plus an unspent carry forward balance from prior year(s) (\$5,449) were available for upland game bird releases at the start of FY13, totaling \$106,564 (Table 2). Consistent with the strategic plan, the 15% funds were further divided between pheasant releases (87%), emergency feeding (10%), and wild turkey transplants (3%).

Table 3. Summary of revenue set aside for the FY13 bird planting fund.

	Balance (\$)	87% (\$)	10% (\$)	3% (\$)
		Pheasant Releases	Emergency Feeding	Wild Turkey Transplants
License Revenue	101,115	87,970	10,112	3,033
Carry forward balance ¹	5,449	5,449		
FY13 Budgets	106,564	93,419	10,112	3,033

¹The balance of funds carried forward was \$15,618. Consistent with prior years, \$10,000 was retained as a funding cushion and \$5,618 was therefore available to spend in FY13.

PHEASANT RELEASES – EXPENDITURES

After polling pheasant raisers in March 2012, the cost per 10-week old pheasant was established at \$8.57. Additionally, the department paid \$1.11 per loaded mile to pheasant raisers for delivery to the release site.

Table 4 summarizes FY13 pheasant release revenue and expenditures. Of the 15% funds set aside for the bird planting fund - including the unspent funds from the previous year – the department expended \$79,568 on pheasant releases, about 79% of the funds set aside.

Table 4. Revenue and expenditure summary for pheasant releases during FY13.

Total Funds Allocated to Pheasant Releases	Total Expenditures	Unspent Balance (Estimated)
\$93,419	\$79,568	\$13,851

PHEASANT RELEASES – CONTRACTS

Pen-reared pheasants that are at least 10-weeks old are released into suitable habitat between August 1 and September 15 (Figure 8). Landowners awarded contracts must allow a predetermined amount of free public access based on the number of hunter-days listed on the contract. Table 5 summarizes the number of contracts authorized for pheasant releases.

Region 4 experienced a decline in number of applications due in part because a local pheasant raiser did not provide pheasants for the program and landowner interest in the program has declined in recent years.



Figure 8. Pheasants survey their new habitat before taking flight (Region 4).

Table 5. Summary of pheasant release applications and contracts awarded by region.

Regions	# Contracts	# Pheasants Released
4	2	230
6	66	7,435
7	12	1,316
TOTAL	80	8,981

TURKEY TRANSPLANTS

No wild turkey transplants occurred in FY 2013. Although Region 4 has been working on a possible turkey transplant project, turkey numbers in eastern Montana (the likely source areas for Merriam's turkeys) are generally well below average. As numbers recover, more will be available for trap and transplanting.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

Supplemental feeding did not occur in Region 6 during FY13. Route monitoring was conducted from January 2013 through March 2013. During this period, conditions remained mild enough that supplemental feeding criteria were not met.

UPLAND GAME BIRD HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

During FY13, the UGBEP obligated \$119,125 for a combined total of 76 habitat enhancement projects that comprised over 10,386 project acres (Table 7 on page 17). New projects consisted of food plots, nesting cover, Open Fields for Game Bird Hunter sites, and shelterbelts. As a result of these projects, approximately 56,359 acres of land was opened to public upland game bird hunting, providing for an estimated 9,245 hunter-days of hunting opportunity.

All UGBEP projects included shared funding or in-kind contributions from a variety of sources including private landowners, Pheasants Forever chapters, BLM, and USDA programs. Overall, UGBEP funds made up about 21% of project costs, with cooperators and other partners contributing the balance. Information in the far left column indicates whether UGBEP projects were completed on publically managed lands (e.g., United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Natural Resources State Trust Lands (DNRC) or lands currently enrolled in the Block Management Program (noted as BMA) (Table 7).

As of December 2013, the UGBEP has 352 active contracts comprising nearly 426,000 project acres with nearly 790,000 acres available for public upland game bird hunting. A summary of UGBEP contracts over the past 7 years (Table 6).

Table 6. Summary of active UGBEP projects from past UGBEP reports.

Report	#UGBEP Contracts (Active)	Project Acres	Access Acres
FY13	352	426,000	790,000
FY11 and 12	256	300,000	675,000
FY10 ¹	301	320,000	770,000
FY07 and 08	268	330,000	800,000

¹Annual reporting began in FY10. The sum of total active contracts reported in FY11/12 and FY 07/08 rows were derived from the biennial legislative reports.

Table 7. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during FY 2013.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Aspen Regeneration (USFS)	5	Carbon	04/15/13	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$0	\$60,000	50	50
CRP Enhancements	6	Sheridan	08/01/12	\$37,320	\$0	\$12,245	\$49,565	573	921
CRP Enhancements (BMA)	6	Daniels	07/10/12	\$3,504	\$1,139	\$4,643	\$9,286	219	1,910
CRP Enhancements (DNRC)	6	Daniels	07/16/12	\$5,328	\$1,776	\$14,208	\$21,312	333	480
Nesting Cover	7	McCone	07/18/12	\$1,760	\$572	\$2,332	\$4,664	110	1,280
Nesting Cover (BMA)	7	Daniels	09/21/12	\$1,888	\$614	\$2,502	\$5,004	118	1,908
Nesting Cover (BMA)	7	Garfield	09/21/12	\$3,952	\$1,284	\$5,236	\$10,472	247	938
Nesting Cover (WMA)	4	Teton	04/22/13	\$500	\$2,250	\$0	\$2,750	10	***
Nesting Cover (WMA)	4	Teton	04/22/13	\$5,775	\$10,800	\$0	\$16,575	60	***
Nesting Cover (WMA)	6	Phillips	11/26/12	\$600	\$410	\$761	\$1,771	40	***
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Cascade	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,600	\$7,600	152	163
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Cascade	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$2,650	\$2,650	106	118
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Cascade	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	262

*** Access acres accounted for in another project defined in the same UGBEP contract.

Table 7 – continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during FY 2013.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	511
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,840	\$5,840	146	240
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	\$5,600	155	315
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Chouteau	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,600	\$5,600	160	398
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Glacier	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	286
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$1,750	\$1,750	70	482
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,600	\$3,600	90	482
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	424
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Pondera	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	332
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,120	\$6,120	153	232
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,125	\$3,125	125	158
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	178

Table 7 – continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during FY 2013.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$1,040	\$1,040	26	238
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$2,475	\$2,475	99	139
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Teton	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,005	\$5,005	143	158
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,635	\$8,635	157	221
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	231
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	220
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$5,960	\$5,960	149	232
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	4	Toole	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,800	\$4,800	160	257
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	546
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,800	\$4,800	160	312
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	640
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	520
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,560	\$4,560	152	159

Table 7 – continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during FY 2013.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,630	\$7,630	160	760
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	160
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	400
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Daniels	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	367
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,200	\$6,200	155	159
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	480
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	212
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	480
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Roosevelt	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,750	\$3,750	150	310
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$2,950	\$2,950	274	118
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	6	Sheridan	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$3,875	\$3,875	155	160

Table 7 – continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during FY 2013.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	625
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,000	\$6,000	150	310
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,000	\$4,000	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$8,000	\$8,000	160	640
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,120	\$4,120	103	320
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Dawson	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$4,770	\$4,770	106	114
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Fallon	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	248
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Fallon	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$6,400	\$6,400	160	600
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,000	\$7,000	140	290

Table 7 – continued. UGBEP habitat enhancement projects initiated during FY 2013.

Project Type (Public land or Block Management notation)	Region	County	Project Effective Date	Obligated Costs				Project Acres	Acres Open to Hunting
				UGBEP	Cooperator	Other Partners	Project Total		
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	McCone	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$7,200	\$7,200	160	195
Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters	7	Richland	09/01/12	\$0	\$0	\$1,000	\$1,000	20	310
Shelterbelts	6	Daniels	10/05/12	\$13,680	\$6,981	\$0	\$20,660	5	2,640
Shelterbelts (WMA)	6	Daniels	11/26/12	\$2,652	\$1,190	\$7,220	\$11,062	5	400
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Custer	09/20/12	\$1,350	\$450	\$0	\$1,800	9	5,440
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	McCone	09/20/12	\$1,500	\$500	\$0	\$2,000	10	2,240
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	McCone	09/21/12	\$900	\$300	\$0	\$1,200	6	2,240
Winter Food or Cover Plots	7	Fallon	09/15/12	\$900	\$300	\$0	\$1,200	6	1,640
Winter Food or Cover Plots (WMA)	1	Lake	06/25/13	\$4,500	\$6,500	\$0	\$11,000	120	4,000
Winter Food or Cover Plots (WMA)	4	Teton	04/01/13	\$610	\$1,820	\$0	\$2,430	24	12,000
Winter Food or Cover Plots (WMA)	4	Teton	04/22/13	\$2,406	\$4,500	\$0	\$6,906	25	***
TOTALS				\$119,125	\$71,385	\$365,202	\$555,712	10,386	56,359

*** Access acres accounted for in another project defined in the same UGBEP contract.

Both private landowners and public land agencies can enter into UGBEP contracts or agreements to receive cost-share to enhance habitat for upland game birds. Table 8 provides a summary of the types of partnerships initiated in FY13.

Table 8. Private and public land UGBEP contracts initiated in FY13.

Summary	Total Contracts	New UGBEP Cooperators ¹	Project Acres	Access Acres	Hunter-Days
Private Land	67	57	9,719	39,429	4,145
Public Land	9	3	667	16,930	5,100
TOTAL	76	60	10,386	56,359	9,245

¹Prior to enrollment, these cooperators have not participated in any FWP programs in the past.

PROGRAM PARTNERSHIPS

HABITAT FARMING PARTNERSHIPS: DENTON AND BILLINGS

As of April 1, 2013, the UGBEP entered into two 5-year contractual agreements with Habitat Forever, LLC, to fund 2 Habitat Specialist positions. These positions are located in the Billings area (Region 5) and the Denton area (Region 4) with the primary purpose to conduct intensive habitat enhancements and maintenance activities to improve habitat for game birds and other wildlife. The outcome of these activities not only provides productive habitat for upland game birds but also provides quality opportunities for upland game bird hunters in areas where hunting access is limited.

For FY13, the UGBEP contributed \$53,995 and \$40,160 to support the Habitat Specialist positions in Denton and Billings, respectively. The Bureau of Land Management contributed an additional 50% (i.e., \$40,160) towards the Billings partnership. These expenditures are included in Table 1, but much of the work conducted through these contracts is maintenance of existing projects and therefore are not part of Table 7. Work completed through these two contracts during FY13 is described below.

REGION 4 DENTON-BASED HABITAT SPECIALIST (FWP/HF/PF PARTNERSHIP)

The following projects have been developed and subsequently maintained by the Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever (CMCPF) and the Habitat Forever Habitat Specialist. This partnership primarily focuses on 4 properties: PF Coffee Creek (800 deeded acres of access); PF Wolf Creek (1,000 deeded acres of access); DNRC Wolf Creek (2,500 acres of access); and the Beckman WMA (6,568 acres of access), totaling over 10,000 acres of hunting access.

Throughout FY13, habitat work included maintenance of two shelterbelts on the PF Wolf Creek property and three shelterbelts on FWP's Beckman Wildlife Management Area. Establishing over 3 miles of silver sagebrush (double rows) was also completed on the PF Wolf Creek property (Figure 9). Ongoing efforts include mechanical tillage, in-row hand weeding, control of currant worms in the golden currant and tent caterpillars in the chokecherries, and spraying and cultivating field bindweed infestations. See Table 8 for a summary of FY13 habitat enhancement activities.

In FY13, the UGBEP contributed \$56,761 to enhance 139 acres on 30 project sites (Table 8) that provided a combined total of 10,868 acres of public access for upland game bird hunting.



Figure 9. Planting silver sagebrush on PF Wolf Creek property.

Table 9. Summary of Habitat Forever and Pheasant Forever enhancement and maintenance activities in the Denton area.

Beckman WMA Project Type	Total Project Sites¹	Total Habitat Acres¹
Nesting Cover/Food Plot	1	10
Food Plot	(4)	(5)
Shelterbelt	3(2)	8(7)
Silver Sage Travel Corridors	(1)	(16 acres, 5.21 miles of double-rows)
Sub-total	4(7)	18(28)
DNRC-Wolf Creek Project Type	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Shelterbelt	1	4
Sub-total	1	4
PF-Wolf Creek Project Type	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Shelterbelt	(2)	(6)
Silver Sage Travel Corridors	(1)	(10 acres, 3.14 miles of double-rows)
Sub-total	(3)	(16)
PF-Coffee Creek Project Type	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Food Plot	(6)	(27)
Nesting Cover (DNC)	(1)	(3)
Shelterbelt	(7)	(37)
Sub-total	(14)	(67)
DNRC-Coffee Creek Project Type	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Food Plot	(1)	(6)
Sub-total	(1)	(6)
GRAND TOTAL	5(25)	22(117)

¹Numbers in parentheses indicate existing projects that have been maintained.

REGION 5 BILLINGS-BASED HABITAT SPECIALIST (FWP/HF/BLM PARTNERSHIP)

Partnership funding in support of the Billings Habitat Forever farming position and associated work is intended for restoring and enhancing pheasant and other upland game bird habitat on public lands open to hunting along the Yellowstone River and its major tributaries in Yellowstone, Treasure, Stillwater, Carbon, Bighorn, and Sweetgrass counties in Montana. During FY13, efforts continued to focus on three tracts of public land: BLM Pompeys Pillar, Sundance Special Recreation Management Area, and the Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area. In FY13, the UGBEP contributed \$40,160 to enhance 291 acres on 31 project sites (Table

10) that provided a combined total of 1,220 acres of public access for upland game bird hunting.

Habitat enhancements included irrigated food plots, dry land food plots, irrigated nesting cover, dry land nesting cover, irrigated brood plots, wetland development, water development, riparian vegetation restoration, and shelterbelt/winter cover plantings and maintenance (Figure 10).

Table 10. Summary of Habitat Forever enhancement and maintenance activities in the Billings area.

BLM Pompey's Pillar Project Type	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Nesting Cover (Irrigated)	(9)	(114)
Food Plot (Irrigated)	(3)	(44)
Nesting /Wetland/Brood	(1)	(8)
Brood/Food Plot	(1)	(3)
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>(14)</i>	<i>(169)</i>
BLM Sundance SRMA Project Type	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Nesting Cover	(6)	(34.8)
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>(6)</i>	<i>(34.8)</i>
YWMA Project Type	Total Project Sites	Total Habitat Acres
Food Plot (Irrigated)	(2)	(20.7)
Nesting Cover (Irrigated)	(3)	(54.3)
Nesting Cover (Dryland)	(4)	(8.4)
Wetland Development	(1)	(3.3)
Shelterbelt/Brood Plot	(1)	(0.2)
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>(11)</i>	<i>(87)</i>
GRAND TOTAL	(31)	(291)



Figure 10. Sorghum provides excellent winter cover and food for pheasants and other wildlife (Yellowstone WMA).

PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS MONTANA

Throughout its history, the UGBEP works with a variety of partners, including many landowners, state, federal, and county government agencies and nongovernment conservation partners. Table 11 summarizes the growing list of agency and organization partners the program has teamed up with to enhance habitats for upland game birds.

Table 11. Summary of agencies and conservation groups who partnered on UGBEP projects.

Region 1	Region 3
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Five Valleys Chapter of Pheasants Forever Mission Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever	Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever Bureau of Land Management, Butte Field Office Gallatin Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever Headwaters Chapter of Pheasants Forever Lazy Game Birds NRCS Field Office, Beaverhead County US Fish Wildlife Service – Arctic Grayling Program
Region 4	Region 5
Central Montana Chapter of Pheasants Forever DNRC State Lands, Conrad Unit DNRC State Lands, Lewistown Unit East End Colony Eastslope Kennels and Game Birds Farm Service Agency, Cascade County Farm Service Agency, Chouteau Farm Service Agency, Glacier County Farm Service Agency, Pondera County Farm Service Agency, Teton County	Billings Rod & Gun Club Bureau of Land Management, Billings Field Office Habitat Forever, Billings Otter Creek Gamebird Farm Yellowstone Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever

Farm Service Agency, Toole County Habitat Forever, Lewistown Headwaters Chapter of Pheasants Forever MT Salinity Control Association NRCS Field Office, Cascade County NRCS Field Office, Chouteau County NRCS Field Office, Glacier County NRCS Field Office, Pondera County NRCS Field Office, Teton County NRCS Field Office, Toole County Pondera County Conservation District Upper Missouri Chapter of Pheasants Forever	
Region 6	Region 7
Daniels County Conservation District East End Colony Farm Service Agency, Daniels County Farm Service Agency, McCone County Farm Service Agency, Roosevelt County Farm Service Agency, Sheridan County Farm Service Agency, Valley County Flaxville Chapter of Pheasants Forever Gallatin Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever National Wild Turkey Federation NRCS Field Office, Sheridan County NRCS Field Office, Roosevelt County NRCS Field Office, Daniels County Roosevelt County Conservation District Sheridan County Commissioners Sheridan County Conservation District Sheridan County Road Department Sorenson Pheasant Farm USFWS Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge	NRCS Field Office, Richland County NRCS Field Office, Carter County NRCS Field Office, Baker County NRCS Field Office, Custer County Richland County Chapter of Pheasants Forever Sandstone Chapter Pheasants Forever Tongue River Chapter PF Miles City BLM Office Birds of Plenty

HUNTER SURVEY

An UGBEP survey is available online and year-round with the link published in the UGBEP Projects Access Guide. During FY13, 166 respondents provided input on the UGBEP program, upland game bird hunting in general, or subjects unrelated to the program. Of the 166 respondents, 66 hunters were non-residents and 100 were Montana residents (Table 12). Sixty-five respondents included their level of satisfaction with the UGBEP (Table 13). Table 14 provides a representation of the comments received specific to the program. Not all comments are shown.

Table 12. Summary of respondents and use of UGBEP projects

Respondents			Hunt on UGBEP Projects	
	Number	%	Yes	No
Resident	100	60	Resident 33	85
Nonresident	66	40	Nonresident 15	33
Total	166		48	118

Table 13. Satisfaction level of UGBEP Projects

UGBEP Project Satisfaction Level (N = 65)					
	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Unknown
Resident	8	25	9	5	71
Nonresident	5	7	2	4	30
	13	32	11	9	101

Table 14. Compilation of abbreviated comments received by hunters in regard to the UGBEP.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Providing excellent hunting opportunities is what keeps hunter like me coming back and pumping money into local economies.	The program appears to be working as the sites I visited appeared to have good cover and feed on or adjacent to the property. The UGBEP information package was very useful for a hunter new to the area. Good Job.	Release more pheasants, get more areas near Bozeman and Livingston.	The properties in the program have to be signed. Three of the 4 I hunted had no signs.
Thank you for making non-residents feel welcome.	I would not restrict the total number of days a hunter can access the location. Especially if there aren't any other hunters trying to use that area (i.e. no waiting list).	Print guide earlier and mail out.	
Nice program, please continue and add more properties.	Need good oversight on management and maintenance to insure that the habitat improvements are sustained over time. Good program.	More areas in Southeast section of the state.	
Property lines need to be marked better for state sections, blm, etc	Integrate the UGEP information into the Block Management Guide....maybe more like a Hunter access guide.	More precise mapping of BMA land and private property.	

Better maps and contact information with landowners	Need more ugbeep areas...		
	Make it easier to make contact for hunting permission		
	Better markings.		

MONITORING CONTRACTS

During FY13, the UGB Habitat Biologists visited a total of 154 active project sites to evaluate the status and productivity of shelterbelts, food and cover plots, dense nesting cover, and grazing management projects. In addition to project assessment, the contractors ensured each UGBEP project had program signs with correct landowner contact information. Where needed, the biologists posted new signs and updated landowner contact information.

UGBEP DATABASE

During FY13, there was ongoing reconciliation of active and expired UGBEP habitat enhancement contracts with the program database. As of November 2013, the present goal is to check the last 221 UGBEP habitat contracts and to enter pheasant release contracts pre-2007. An additional feature was added to the database during FY13 to keep track of completed projects in order to de-obligate unused funds.

UGBEP WEB SITE TRAFFIC

Program staff frequently monitor web page use during peak program times such as special program alerts and timelines, pheasant releases, and projects access guide availability. Table 15 provides yearlong counts for various program web pages.

Table 15. Web page traffic occurring during FY13.

Web Page	Unique Pageviews ¹	Pageviews
Default program	2,373	3,391
Pheasant Release	1156	1,245
Open Fields	11,019	14,105
Advisory Council	524	675
UGBEP Access Guide	19,543	27,892

¹A *unique pageview* represents the number of sessions during which that page was viewed one or more times. From: Google Analytics
(https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1257084?hl=en#pageviews_vs_unique_views)